



GENERAL INFORMATION: WHAT IS ORGANIC GARDENING?

The term **organic gardening** refers to a collection of environmentally sensitive methods used to grow food or flowers.

ORGANIC GROWING TECHNIQUES

Most people believe that growing organically means avoiding the use of chemicals like synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. While this is certainly true, organic gardening encompasses a much larger philosophy of creating a holistic, healthy growing environment, working with nature rather than against it. This approach increases the overall health of the garden and reduces pest and disease problems. Here are some important aspects of creating a healthy organic garden.

Soil Care

Soil is the base of the garden and arguably the most important part of an organic system. Treat your soil well and it will repay you with healthy, productive plants!

- Test soil to check nutrient levels and screen for heavy metals.
- Add compost every season to add microorganisms, organic matter, and nutrients.
- Add amendments as recommended on your soil test.
- Avoid compaction (which destroys soil structure) by staying off the planting areas and especially avoiding stepping in the garden when the soil is wet.



WATERING AN ORGANICALLY-GROWN SCHOOL GARDEN



ROW COVER KEEPS OUT PESTS AND MULCH SUPPRESSES WEEDS IN THIS GARDEN

- Resist the urge to over-till. Too much tillage breaks down soil structure that is important for plant root growth and water percolation. Also avoid tilling when the soil is wet.

Growing Conditions

Many manageable growing conditions impact garden health.

- Place food gardens in areas where they receive plenty (at least 6 hrs/day) of light.
- Plant crops at the correct time of year. Most vegetables love either warm or cool growing conditions, so plant them at the appropriate time for them to thrive.
- Follow spacing recommendations. Plants too close to each other will steal nutrients and water from each other and encourage disease.
- Feed and water plants when they need it, but don't overdo it! Plants with too much nutrition or water become stressed.
- Mulch to help reduce weeds, prevent disease, and retain moisture.
- Use a hoe or hand tool to cultivate bare soil when weeds are young, and hand weed around plants.



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Pest and Disease Management

Prevention is the best cure for pests and disease in an organic system.

- Choose disease resistant seeds when possible.
- Select varieties that are hardy, productive, and tried-and-true.
- Mulch to reduce soil-borne disease.
- Think ahead about pests. If you've dealt with pest pressure in the past, consider a different crop variety or planting at a different time or location.
- Create a crop rotation or plant a very diverse garden.
- Avoid working in a wet garden, to keep from spreading disease.
- Remove and destroy diseased plants.
- Attract beneficial insects with flowers and herbs interspersed through the garden.

Organic Products

Prevention is key in organic systems, but sometimes pest or disease controls are needed.

- Select products approved for organic growing, like those with an OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) label.



CHILDREN HARVEST DIVERSE CROPS FROM A SCHOOL GARDEN BED

- Use controls as a last resort, and carefully follow package directions.
- Spray organic pesticides in the morning or evening to avoid affecting beneficial insects.
- Avoid purchasing treated seeds, as they are coated in chemical fungicides.